



Chairperson's Report - January 2024

Friends of Hell Wath Trustees Annual Report **January 2024**

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Membership

When the charity started operating the first membership ran until 31st August 2023. The first membership was made of 34 members, including the 5 trustees.

The second membership cycle started on 1st September 2023 and will run until 31st August 2024 and the membership fee was maintained at £5. As of 31st December 2023, FOHW has 32 members including 6 completely new members.

Of the members that did not renew their membership only three had been active during the first 18 months of operation.

The membership now includes members with specific ecological knowledge and background which is a real enhancement of the capacity of the charity.

The membership fees and membership donations in the first cycle were spent on wildflower seeds and associated materials, supported by £5 contributions for the specific 'grow at home' wildflower project.

This year the membership fees have been invested in 3 Tawny Owl nesting boxes which were commissioned through Ripon Man Shed.

Community Engagement

The FOHW website was launched this year. This cost of this was met by the Skell Valley Project and a significant reduction in charge by BRONCO, a local website company. The Trustees would like to thank both organisations and are exceedingly happy with the end result. An update on visitor data will be offered at the AGM.

Facebook continues to be an important part of our community engagement with 850 followers to date. However, it would be fair to say that social media fatigue means that this has declined in its impact and is also probably not the best way to engage with a younger audience.

Grants

Ripon City Council has awarded FOHW 4-year partnership funding of £1000 a year. This is a great bonus and helps allow for longer term planning. This is on top of previous grants that have allowed for the purchase of tools and storage (installation of the purchased storage has been delayed by planned works behind the Panther's clubhouse).

Partnerships.

The Skell Valley Project (SVP) is a significant partner. The project provides 3 days a month Countryside Ranger support and approximately £30,000 of funded work



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on site. This year the focus has been on developing the scrub management further as well as the major repairs to the Statutory footpath. We also continue to benefit from guided activities and training offered by the Skell Valley Project as well as funding for community activities like the Forest Schools Day and meetings such as our AGM. We have also mentioned that the SVP provided the funding for our website.

In the upcoming 18 months the SVP will undertake repairs to the Fairy Steps, begin planning and installation of on-site Interpretation Panels and help further with the scrub management plans.

We have also been fortunate to have started to benefit from the support of Open Country. After some initial work commissioned by NYC and SVP, scything and clearing grass, they have undertaken further work laying new path surfaces, tree planting and further grass clearance. Open Country normally charges £250 for a full day's work with their volunteers and support staff. This is immensely good value as it usually involves over ten people for a full day and all the equipment is brought with them. In addition, extra days have been provided without any charge when other activities have fallen through.

DEFRA/CABI: The DEFRA funded and CABI produced Himalayan Balsam rust has been applied for the second and final year. This will be monitored going forward for evidence of taking hold and spreading. The funding for this was way beyond the capacity of FOHW or NYC and the technical facilities and skills of CABI are unique in this area. This project would have been impossible without the support of both organisations.

The Harrogate Army Foundation College remains an important partner. This year's works have included more physically demanding work including some path repairs and turning over areas for wildflower propagation. Making use of the AFC is proving harder as we have completed many of the more intensive physical jobs and are moving into a greater level of surveying and monitoring and so we will look for pairing up with other organisations to provide enough work in the future.

In 2022/2023 FOHW started the process of seeking Partner Site status with a Charity called the Woodmeadow Trust. Before this could be confirmed this charity became financially vulnerable. Fortunately, their assets and existing partnerships were taken on by a national charity called Plantlife. We are pleased to say that after engagement with Plantlife, Hell Wath is being accepted as partner site and FOHW will benefit from support from Plantlife going forward. Details will follow in the new year.

Hedgerow/Tree Planting

Last year we stated that no new areas of hedgerow planting would be started, with a focus on completing existing areas of planting. The key focus was therefore the boundary between the Choir School estate and Hell Wath. This was especially important as the later planting in 2022 and then a prolonged dry spell had resulted in between 30% and 50% loss of whips planted. However, these



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have all been replaced and gaps have been filled and the lower end of this boundary was officially added to the Platinum Jubilee Canopy project (800 whips in total).

We also filled the gap between the playing fields and secured this with fencing to allow the whips to mature in safety.

In the summer we were advised that NYC were offering us the chance to plant almost half a hectare of new trees on the site. After six months of planning planting was undertaken in the nature reserve part of the site and near the Giant Steps. This was achieved using more mature saplings provided by NYC and a further 450 whips provided by TCV. One area of planting will create a further small mammal corridor between the top and bottom halves of the site and the rest has thickened the areas of tree bordering the larger meadow nearest to the city centre. We were also able to thicken the planting between the playing fields for a richer future habitat.

Site Surveying

Members are now undertaking an increasingly large amount of site ecological surveying, In 2022 members started weekly summer butterfly counts. With additional training on ID skills this has continued in 2023 and will be part of an annual schedule of work. The number and variety of butterflies is a key indicator of the health of the site.

Another such indicator is the presence of wax cap fungi and two separate fungi surveys have been undertaken with some sign of increased numbers and varieties in the area of the greatest scrub clearance.

With support of the Ripon Bat Group members have undertaken regular summer bat surveys using bat call meters provided by the Ripon Bat Group. There are six varieties of bats currently recorded on site. Through the Ripon Bat Group we have also been able to source almost 30 bat boxes that have been put up around the site. These will be monitored from the ground to look for evidence of roosting bats. Some are already inhabited. Please note that it is illegal for anyone other than licensed people to climb up and inspect these boxes, or interfere with them in any way.

Through the RCC Partnership funding the trustees have been able to commission a site tree survey that will be undertaken in the new year.

Through our membership a further development of our surveying will start in 2024. This will allow for easier organised and independent surveying/recording to be undertaken and details will follow in the new year.

Himalayan Balsam

Himalayan Balsam clearing remains a major activity. The introduction of Scything has helped with this allow for more open areas of Balsam to be cleared in shorter periods of time.



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Himalayan Balsam pulling in organised groups and by walking individuals continues to be important. Balsam should not be removed from the site to avoid infecting other areas. As a result, you will continue to see piles of pulled, snapped and stomped balsam during the summer and autumn months.

We are pleased to confirm that latest inspections show early signs that the Himalayan Balsam Rust application site has started to take. This is a long-term strategy but will, if successful be a key part of our strategy going forward.

Management Plan

The first Management Plan was written in 2019 and was updated in 2022. The Management Plan is due for a full review in 2024. Throughout 2023 it has been clear that this Plan will have to evolve significantly from the original plan. It is expected that a central general plan will be supported with specific strategic plans for key ecological aspects of the site including:

1. Wildflowers & Grasslands
2. Trees
3. Waterways (Pond & River)
4. Invasive native and non-native species
5. Bats
6. Birds

These key areas will have specific strategic ambitions as well as more frequently reviewed action plans.

We are reviewing an option to have the new Management Plan written by external consultants, funded by the SVP. Members will be invited to take part in this review as well as support the community consultation that is required.

Key to the impact of this plan will be the clarity of ownership of the plan and the related responsibilities for implementing this. This will all be detailed in the final plan.

Cllr Stuart Martin
Chairperson
Trustees
Friends of Hell Wath

Friends of Hell Wath

Charitable Incorporated Organisation

Charity No 1195980

Income and Expenditure Statement **Financial Year 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023**

	£	£
Income:		
Transfer from FOHW Community Voluntary Group	1095.23	
Charity Membership Fees	170.00	
Donations	587.00	
Receipts for Wildflower Seed Packs	120.00	
Local Lotto Funding	524.00	
TOTAL INCOME		2496.23
Expenditure:		
Insurance	127.68	
Legal Fees	100.00	
Donation to Ripon Photographic Society (website photos)	75.00	
Purchase of Wildflower Seeds & Materials	161.91	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	<hr/>	464.59
NET INCOME	£	2031.64
Opening Bank Account Balance		0.00
Net income for the period		2031.64
Closing Bank Balance	£	2031.64

Presented by:

Carol Leo, Treasurer

Presented to the Annual General Meeting (18th Jan 2024)